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SMITHSONIAN DEPOSIT

Samuel de Champlain;

A SHORT SKETCH

—BY—

Henry H. Hurlbut.

SAMUEL DE CHAMPLAIN;

A BRIEF SKETCH

OF THE

EMINENT NAVIGATOR AND DISCOVERER.

READ BEFORE THE CHICAGO HISTORICAL SOCIETY,
TUESDAY EVENING, OCTOBER 20, 1885,

BY

HENRY H. HURLBUT.

A PORTRAIT OF THE GREAT EXPLORER,

PAINTED BY

MISS HARRIET P. HURLBUT,

WAS ON THIS OCCASION PRESENTED IN HER NAME TO THE SOCIETY.

CHICAGO:
FERGUS PRINTING COMPANY.
1885.

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HISTORICAL SOCIETY ROOMS,
CHICAGO, October 22, 1885.

DEAR MISS HURLBUT:

I have the honor to inform you that at a Quarterly Meeting of the Chicago Historical Society, held on the 20th inst., on motion of Hon. Mark Skinner the thanks of the Society were unanimously tendered to you for the excellent and valuable portrait of Samuel de Champlain you so generously presented to the Society.

Very respectfully,

ALBERT D. HAGER,
Secretary.

MISS HARRIET P. HURLBUT, Chicago.

The thanks of the Historical Society were also given to Mr. Hurlbut for the Paper read by him on evening of October 20, 1885.

Samuel de Champlain.

Mr. President and Members of the Historical Society, Ladies and Gentlemen:

FROM the enlarged notes of a work now in preparation by myself and intended for publication, to be entitled "Our Inland Seas and Early Lake Navigation," I will, with your leave, read a sketch, or rather an imperfect outline portrayal, of the movements in the life of the first white man who came within the basin of the great American Lakes; the first European, I may say, that saw and navigated not only the small yet storied body of water drained by the Sorel, but that of Lake Ontario; and who, furthermore, was the first who looked upon the face of Lake Huron. I need not suggest that there is an evident propriety for the Historical Society of the greatest City of the Lakes to pay at least some tribute to the memory of our earliest explorer, who passed over the waters of Lake Ontario more than sixty years before LaSalle built Fort Frontenac by its banks, and more than a quarter of a century before either Joliet or Marquette, the first-known white men at Chicago, were born. I speak of Samuel de Champlain.

Though James Cartier, in 1535, passed up the St. Lawrence River as far as the Island of Hochelaga, to which he gave the name of Monte Royal, yet singular as it seems, he nor any other European, as far as we know, never reached any of our great Lakes for three-fourths of a century succeeding.

Samuel de Champlain was the son of Antoine de Champlain (a captain in the French marine), and the maiden name of his mother was Marguerite Leroy; he was born in the village of Brouage, in the ancient Province of Saintonge, about the year 1567. Little is known of the boyhood days of Champlain; his home-village was a fortified town, and its harbor, available for large ships, was called one of the best in France. Not only was Brouage a post of some military importance, but it was the manufacturing centre and port of shipment of a large trade in salt; and these were the two great interests of the people in citadel and seaport of the busy Brouage.

During many years of Champlain's early life, Brouage was the occasion of frequent struggles of contending parties for its possession, during the civil wars of the time. While these vicissitudes must have been perplexing to close study in school, and while Champlain's school education was no doubt limited, there was yet a discipline in that misfortune, and his active habits and excellent common-sense led him to educate himself.

It was no slight good fortune for Champlain that he often came in contact with men of high character, connected with the military and commercial departments of Brouage. It is supposed that he paid considerable attention to the study and practice of drawing, as his after-efforts in that line were, and are still, of no little interest and value.

Early in the year 1599, he was in command of a large French ship, chartered by the Spanish government for a voyage to the West Indies. Just previously, however, he had been connected with the French army as quartermaster for several years, yet still before that he must have had practical experience in navigation; indeed he acknowledged the fact,

for he has confessed the fascination which attracted his early life to that employment. In the Spanish voyage referred to, including not merely a view of various West-India Islands and important ports, but casting his anchor in the roadstead of San Juan d'Ulloa (then as today the island castle and defence of Vera Cruz), he visited not merely Porto Bello on the Isthmus, by a native sail-boat, but from Vera Cruz he passed into the interior, spending a month at the City of Mexico.

This voyage embraced a period of somewhat over two years, and in it Champlain carried out a purpose of his own, which was to make extended notes and drawings of whatever seemed worth his observation; not for his own gratification merely, but for use and aid to the French government. It was Champlain that made the first suggestion of the benefits to be derived from a ship-canal across the Isthmus of Panama.

It is understood that after an able communication by Champlain to his own government,* regarding matters and things coming within his notice in the Spanish possessions of America, he was honored not only with the gift of a pension from the French king, Henry IV., but it is believed that from the same source there was also conferred upon him a patent of nobility.

In March, 1603, Champlain first sailed, for northern America, having joined the expedition under Pont Gravé, which had been organized by Gov. Aymer de Chastes. The fleet consisted of two barques of small size, accompanied by

* The full and illustrated account of that voyage to Spanish America by Champlain continued in manuscript more than two centuries and a half, but in 1859, after an English translation, it was printed in London by the Hakluyt Society.

one or more craft of still less burthen, and arrived in the St. Lawrence River at a place called Tadoussac, at the mouth of Saguenay River.

I wish to make here a slight digression, and say that we have no authentic knowledge of an earlier people who dwelt by or navigated our great lakes and their tributary or neighboring waters, than various tribes of our North-American Indians. These Indians, we are to presume, were the inventors and from time immemorial have been the manufacturers of that famous and historic little craft, the birch-bark canoe. The first description which we have of this canoe appears identical with that manufactured by our northern Indians of today. Though no long distances very far from shore were often attempted, the ability of this canoe when well managed, even in a pretty rough sea, is not slight.

The Indian canoes of the old fur-companies were usually large, of some four or five tons burthen. How many centuries previously they may have been in use we have no means of telling, yet two hundred and eighty-two years ago, in 1603, Champlain met them at the Saguenay, and which he afterward spoke of as "from eight to nine paces long, and about a pace or pace and a-half broad in the middle, growing narrower toward the two ends." "They are apt," said he, "to turn over, in case one does not understand managing them, and are made of birch bark, strengthened on the inside by little ribs of white cedar, very neatly arranged; they are so light that a man can easily carry one." Said Gouverneur Morris: "Among the curiosities of newly-discovered America was the Indian canoe. Its slender and elegant form, its rapid movement, its capacity to bear burdens and resist the rage of the billows and torrents, excited no small degree of admiration for the skill by which it was con-

structed." The Chippewas call it che-maun, and it was this same sort of vessel in which Champlain passed into lakes Champlain, Huron, and Ontario; the same in which Joliet and Marquette voyaged down the Mississippi, the same in which, differing as I must from the opinion of our worthy secretary, they navigated the Chicago. The Society, it is noticed, has a small specimen of this canoe.

After looking a few miles up the Saguenay, Gravé and and Champlain, in a light boat, ascended the St. Lawrence as far as the Falls of St. Louis, now called the Lachine Rapids, and by the way going a short distance on what they called the River of the Iroquois, now known as the Sorel or Richelieu. Unable to pass the rapids in their boat, they returned to their vessels at the outlet of the Saguenay.

Upon this first visit of Champlain to the St. Lawrence, he questioned the Indians about the river and waters above and beyond what he had seen; in a manner, imperfectly however, they told of the Rapids of the upper St. Lawrence, Lake Ontario, the Falls of Niagara, Lake Erie, and the Strait of Detroit. Of anything beyond they professed no knowledge. In the month of September of that year, 1603, Gravé and Champlain reached France. Champlain now learned that his friend de Chastes had died in his absence; he exhibited to his sovereign, however, a map which he had drawn of the region he had visited, together with an account of what he had learned.

In 1604, two vessels left France, having Champlain on board one of them; a new expedition for colonial settlement in America, north of latitude 40°, N., having been organized by Sieur de Monts. Arriving in America, and passing a severe winter at a temporary station, Champlain after thoroughly exploring the coasts of New England, New Bruns-

wick, and Nova Scotia, and after three years absence, reached France in 1607, where he spent the succeeding winter.

Champlain is distinguished for his survey of the New-England coast, extending also to the northern limits of Nova Scotia. While other explorers made but slight examinations, imperfectly described, his account is thorough, and, furthermore, is illustrated by drawings of the seashore, rivers, harbors, etc.

Again Champlain had reached the St. Lawrence, in June, 1608, and while a barque was being constructed, he explored the Saguenay and also the St. Lawrence, and where at the site of a future city, then called Quebec—an Algonkin word, meaning a narrowing—he was impressed with its peculiar attractions, and decided to commence a settlement there at once. The decision was followed directly by the felling of trees and the erection of buildings. Fortunately, a few days after their arrival there, it was revealed to Champlain that a plan was about perfected among a number of the men to assassinate not only him but others also, and then conduct matters as they might choose. By a cautious and prompt movement, however, four of the ringleaders were placed in irons, and, after a trial, one was hanged and the others sent to France for further treatment.

One of the vessels sailed for France in September, but Champlain remained to spend the winter with the little colony at Quebec. That winter, however, was one of sickness and death; from an exclusively salt diet they were attacked with the scurvy, and twenty out of the twenty-eight had died before winter had disappeared. Of the Indians in the neighborhood also, many died from starvation, for Champlain could only, from his limited supplies, afford slight relief. But spring at length succeeded that winter of

death, and in June, Gravé again appeared with a vessel in the St. Lawrence.

Champlain now prepared to carry out his plans for exploring the interior. A fierce war was then existing between the Algonkin tribes of the north and the great Iroquois confederacy of the region now called New York. It was proposed to Champlain by the Indians, in consideration of services to be rendered him in his travels as guides, interpreters, and canoe-men, that he should aid them in their battles with their enemies, the Iroquois. To this he consented.

Whether or not it was wise for Champlain to conclude such a treaty with his newly-found red friends may at least be questioned. I do not, however, believe with Mr. George Geddes that "but for the mistake of Champlain, and the unwise treatment of the Five Nations that followed, the government of the continent would have fallen to the French rather than to the English." Yet the consequences resulting from the acceptance and ratification of the agreement referred to, for more than a century and a half involved a multitude of gory witnesses; it was a most unfortunate precedent, too readily copied. Torture, human blood, and human scalps were the seals of the cruel strife, of which instances by the hundred might be quoted. The governments of France and Great Britain in their contests for dominion helped onward the red-handed crime.

America, after breaking loose from the crown of Great Britain, fell heir to the miseries of the system referred to. In the words of DeWitt Clinton, "The whole confederacy, except a little more than half of the Oneidas, hung like the scythe of death upon the rear of our settlements, and their deeds are inscribed with the scalping-knife and the tomahawk in characters of blood on the fields of Wyoming and Cherry Valley, and on the banks of the Mohawk."

I need not recite particulars of Champlain's tour of that year, 1609, accompanying his Indian friends upon a war excursion against their enemies, the Iroquois, farther than to say that he then discovered the lake since called after him; and if, as he seems to have acknowledged, he then introduced to the acquaintance of the Indians of the great Iroquois league the fatal effects of firearms, by killing three of their chiefs, it was not the most unfortunate first salutation of a deadly agent which came to the red men. That same year of 1609, Henry Hudson sailed up the river which received his name. On that occasion, the renowned yet baneful fire-water was pressed upon the notice of the savages. Of the two satanic inventions, gunpowder and whiskey, the last, with its numerously-named congeners, is reasonably believed to have been the most destructive.

Returning to Quebec, Champlain sailed with Gravé for France, arriving out in October. Again in April of the following year, 1610, he reached the mouth of the Saguenay. He found his Indian allies had in view another expedition against the Iroquois, and they again desired his assistance. I may say that they accordingly attacked a party of the enemy, who were located near the mouth of the Sorel; and, as in the previously-named battle, came off victors.

Hearing of the assassination of King Henry IV., with other unwelcome news from over the sea, Champlain left for France, arriving there in September, 1610. During this visit a contract was made by Champlain with the parents of Helene Boulé, for his marriage with their daughter; the nuptials, however, were not to take place under two years. They were afterward married, and she accompanied him to Quebec some years later.

In the year 1611, he visited the St. Lawrence, but returned

in the autumn of that year. In March, 1613, he again sailed from France, and arrived at Tadoussac in April. A tour up the Ottawa River was soon undertaken by Champlain. The purpose of this expedition was, in great part, to ascertain if there might be found a channel and shorter way to the Pacific and the famed Cathay. Some reports which had been told to Champlain led to strengthen his belief in and to look for such a passage. Champlain, after a journey of some two hundred miles from the St. Lawrence, up the channel and over the portages around the numerous falls of the Ottawa, reached Allumette Island in that river. Here Champlain raised a cross of cedar, to which he attached the arms of France; not succeeding, however, in the main purpose of his journey. Returning, he embarked for France the same year, and where he remained through the year 1614, making plans for the success of his colony.

He was particularly impressed with the importance of establishing "the Christian faith in the wilds of America." By his efforts, four Franciscan friars were secured for such a mission, who embarked with himself for America in the spring of 1615. One of them, Joseph LeCaron, was appointed to the distant Wyandotte or Huron tribe of Indians, and set out with great bravery, knowing nothing as he did of those Indians or of the country where they dwelt. Champlain also soon left for the westward, for an expedition had been already planned by the Indians to invade the country of the Iroquois, and the power of Champlain and the deadly arquebus was needed to accompany them to their enemy's stronghold south of Lake Ontario.

Going up the Ottawa, Champlain took a roundabout way to reach Central New York, but he was piloted by the Indians, who doubtless had an axe or rather a tomahawk of

some kind to grind, and so they led him to their place of abode. A part of the route up the Ottawa Champlain had traveled before; now, still farther, he passed via Lake Nepissing and French River into the Georgian Bay of Lake Huron. This course by the Ottawa was the old canoe-route of after-years, the route of the fur-trader's goods from Montreal to Mackinac and the upper lakes. But if it was the shortest channel to the Northwest, it was yet a hard, back-breaking road to travel; its numerous uprising portages and rough paths, which none but the famed and hardy Canadian voyageurs, those toiling, yet uncomplaining and merry *courier des bois*, would endure, each carrying the ninety pounds of pack, box, or cask, whenever the vessel and cargo must take to the land.

When the canoe of Champlain pushed into Lake Huron it was the farthest point westward yet visited by any white man within the basin of the Great Lakes. The statement in several historical works of Michigan, that Champlain or any other European visited the site of Detroit before that date, July, 1615, is certainly an error. The priest LeCaron was a few days earlier than Champlain in the neighborhood of Lake Huron, at a large Indian village, but that was not by the lake, and we are not advised that he came within sight of it. From the vicinity of the north-east shore of Lake Huron, with only a portion of the force of savages expected to comprise the invading army, Champlain now passed by way of Lake Simcoe and various small lakes, the River Trent, and Bay of Quinte; and whether he went out above or below the Isle of Tonti, the name of which has been stupidly changed to Amherst Island, he, the first of white men, now glided over the waters of Lake Ontario.

Coasting along the east shore in part and partly on foot

upon the sandy beach of the lake, and after secreting their canoes in the woods near the shore, the invaders struck into the forest, and went southward from some point in the present county of Oswego, N.Y. Whether the fortress sought was at Onondaga Lake, as believed by the late Hon. O. H. Marshall, or upon a pond in the county of Madison, as confidentially urged by Gen. Clark, the post of the enemy was reached in due time, and the siege of a rather uncommonly strong Indian stockade began. After considerable time spent in the investment, and some hours of fierce contest, the attacking Indians lost their patience, and concluded to abandon the enterprise. Champlain had endeavored to direct and guide them in the attack, but the thing was impossible; they were an unmanageable, boisterous crowd of ruffians, with no purpose, it would seem, beyond the gratification of cruelty and revenge.

However interesting this marauding adventure may be considered as a matter of history, and though the invading Indians, with Champlain's assistance, had suffered much less than the besieged, it was a bootless expedition. The fortress was not taken, and Champlain was wounded in the leg.

The retreating army now returned to the outlet of Lake Ontario; but the Indians were unwilling to give Champlain an escort down the St. Lawrence, and the result was he was obliged to follow them to the interior and pass a winter in their wigwams. It was summer in the following year, 1616, before Champlain, who was accompanied by the missionary LeCaron, reached Quebec, where they found Gravé from over the sea, and with whom they embarked for France in the month of July. In 1617, and also in 1618, Champlain visited New France, but returned to the fatherland each of those years. He desired something more for his country than a

mere trading-post on the St. Lawrence. To quote the words of Rev. Edmund F. Slafter: "He was anxious to elevate the meagre factory at Quebec into the dignity of a colonial plantation." * Without doubt he had to struggle with the avarice of a company which cared little for New France beyond its own profits in furs. But Champlain enlisted official aid, and by government appointment was made lieutenant of the viceroy of New France, which last-named dignitary was the Duke de Montmorenci, high admiral of France.

Champlain sailed for America, accompanied by his wife, in 1620. His time was now occupied at Quebec during the four ensuing years, energetically attending to the building of various structures and other duties; yet we learn that he had to endure not a few annoyances and discouragements.

In 1624, with his wife he sailed for France, arriving there in October. In April, 1626, he again left France for the St. Lawrence. This was his eleventh voyage across the Atlantic to this river, besides one to the coast of New England.

A new association in place of the former company was organized by the Cardinal Richelieu, the able prime-minister of France, a friend of Champlain. The prospect to Champlain seemed now more promising for his great purpose of French colonization. Hitherto as a colony his settlement had not prospered. We are told that at no time had its numbers exceeded fifty persons; and what seems strange, so unlike our own prairie pioneers, that for a period of twenty years but one family of the colony attempted to gain a living by cultivating the soil.

* To Rev. Edmund F. Slafter I am indebted for many facts used in this Paper, found in his Comprehensive Memoir of Champlain, published in the Prince Society papers.

I do not agree with Mr. DeCosta, that "but for a head-wind when off Cape Cod, sailing southward in 1605, Champlain might have reached the Hudson, and instead of planting Port Royal in Nova Scotia, he might have established its foundations on Manhattan Island, and that this would have made the greatest city in America a French city."

But I will here take the occasion, parenthetically, to make the query, *why it was* that French colonization in America has been comparatively a failure? May the answer be given that it is a national characteristic to be averse to becoming agricultural pioneers? Or may it have been occasioned by the restrictive laws and feudal tenure which came with them from the fatherland? Else was it, as some claim, the result of superstitious and bigoted religious teaching, hampering the freedom of mind and person?

Quebec was founded in 1608, and New France had the opportunity of more than one hundred and fifty years before it finally resigned in favor of Great Britain. A hundred and fifty years from the settlement of New Plymouth had fitted the descendants of those settlers for self-government and the opening drama of the Revolution.

We believe that Champlain and other French explorers were men of broad, practical views, and their plans, embracing the settlement of the vast and fertile basin of the great Lakes and valleys of the St. Lawrence and Mississippi, may certainly be termed grand; yet the genius of the French nation, indeed of any Latin nation, was not fitted to the task. Sterile New England was peopled by another race.

The remaining few years in the life of Champlain may be briefly alluded to: War had broken out between France and Great Britain, and a British fleet appeared in the St. Lawrence in 1628; but it was not until July of the following year

that serious demonstration was made against the post of Quebec, which was then obliged to surrender to a British force. Champlain was taken to England, but as a peace had been arranged even before Quebec had been taken, he was allowed to go to France, and Quebec was restored to French rule.

In March, 1633, Champlain made his last departure from France, being again appointed governor; and he arrived at Quebec in May. He was greeted with demonstrations of great affection, for he was much beloved by his people. In the fort at Quebec, December 25, 1635, after an illness of several months, Champlain died. Somewhere within what is now the court-yard of Quebec post-office his remains lie buried; this much has been satisfactorily proven, yet the exact spot is unknown. It does not appear that Champlain had children. His widow entered a convent, and afterward founded a religious institution in which she herself subsequently entered as a nun. She died in 1654.

We will close this meagre sketch by quoting the following from the Rev. Mr. Slafter, regarding the eminent explorer:

"He was wise, modest, and judicious in council; prompt, vigorous, and practical in administration; simple and frugal in his mode of life; persistent and unyielding in the execution of his plans; brave and valient in danger; unselfish, honest, and conscientious in the discharge of duty."

[The portrait of Champlain was here unveiled.]

It would have been rather a singular circumstance, at the time of the landing of the early settlers of New England, for one of their number, one of the Puritans or Pilgrims, to have volunteered to memorize as praiseworthy the name of any prominent personage connected with the Roman Catholic

Church; but some things seem to have changed, and we trust somewhat improved since that day, and here this evening is a painted portrait of the distinguished navigator of whom I have spoken, copied by a native of the west coast of Lake Michigan, a protestant daughter of the eighth generation, in direct descent from Priscilla of the Mayflower, who is rather a prominent figure in Longfellow's poem, "The Courtship of Miles Standish," and who, in December, 1620, left the cabin of the famous vessel just named, and stepped

"On the wild New-England shore."

We shall not soon forget that the Pilgrims arrived in 1620, but it is well also to remember that Champlain with his vessel spent a day in Plymouth harbor fifteen years before.

This painting, intended as a copy of one of the engraved portraits of Champlain by Moncornet, as it appears in a volume of the Prince Society publications, together with the frame enclosing it (which frame is not altogether without a story, as may be seen on page 80 of the volume known as "Chicago Antiquities"), I beg to present to the Chicago Historical Society in behalf of Miss Harriet P. Hurlbut.

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